CHALLENGING CAREERS in the NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Helping People Help the Land
A lot of people talk about protecting our Nation’s natural resources.

But talk doesn’t get the job done.

We at the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) need people who are committed to action. People who want to apply their education and experience to making sure that all of us enjoy the benefits of productive soil, clean water, clean air, and abundant wildlife that come from a healthy environment.

You can be one of us!
NRCS came out of troubled times—the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s. Dust storms ravaged the Nation’s farmland, stripping away millions of tons of topsoil and carrying it all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. Since that time, NRCS has kept a commitment to protecting and conserving soil and other natural resources on America’s private lands.

NRCS is known worldwide for its accomplishments and innovations in conservation. The people of NRCS are recognized for their talent, dedication, and ingenuity in making the Agency’s programs work. Participation in NRCS conservation programs is voluntary—we help the people we serve take the necessary steps to conserve soil, protect wildlife, restore water quality, promote good land use, and implement other measures to conserve the Nation’s natural resources for future generations.

At NRCS, we take pride in our partnerships. We work with local soil and water conservation districts and many other partners to let people know how important it is to conserve natural resources. And, together, we work with them on how to do it.
NRCS offers career opportunities for those in college and those who have already graduated. Here’s an overview of some of our jobs, along with information about what it takes to come on board.

SOIL CONSERVATIONIST

As an NRCS soil conservationist, you’ll spend most of your time in the field working with farmers, ranchers, foresters, and other land users. You’ll offer conservation planning and technical help to everyone from family farmers to local government officials. You’ll suggest to them ways to conserve the soil, improve water quality, manage nutrients, restore wetlands, and protect and improve wildlife habitat.

You’ll make presentations and demonstrate conservation to clubs and organizations and provide outreach for NRCS programs. You’ll assist in setting local conservation priorities and then help carry them out. And you’ll be able to see the results of your work on the land.

Qualifications: A bachelor’s degree or higher that includes a major field of study (including 300 level courses) in soil conservation or a related agricultural or natural resource discipline such as agronomy, soil science, forestry, agricultural education, or agricultural engineering. The study must include 30 semester hours in a natural resource or agricultural field, including at least 12 semesters hours in a combination of soils and crops or plant science of which 3 semester hours must be in soils and 3 semester hours in crops or plant science (see Note on page 7).
SOIL CONSERVATION TECHNICIAN
NRCS Conservation technicians work directly with farmers, ranchers, and foresters. You’ll survey and design conservation practices, oversee their installation, and ensure they meet our quality standards. The conservation technician is key to the success of NRCS, because most everything you do results in on-the-ground practices that directly improve, conserve, or restore our natural resources.

Qualifications: Knowledge of farm or ranch operations, or work experience that makes you familiar with conservation practices is desirable (see Note on page 7).

SOIL SCIENTIST
As an NRCS soil scientist, you’ll map and classify soils. You’ll identify problems such as soil moisture and erosion. You’ll use digital and satellite imagery to map soils and write descriptions. You’ll sample soils and evaluate their quality, and work with information on watersheds, water quality, and changes in land-use patterns.

Qualifications: A bachelor’s degree or higher in soil science or a closely related discipline that includes 30 semester hours or equivalent in biological, physical, or earth science with a minimum of 15 semester hours in such subjects as soil genesis, pedology, soil chemistry, soil physics, and soil fertility (see Note on page 7).
“My greatest reward with NRCS is to see the smiles on producers’ faces when they get approved for conservation practices...I believe this is the true meaning of the NRCS Mission Statement—Helping People Help the Land.”

James Currington
District Conservationist
Alabama

“I help people help the land...by taking as much of the administrative burden off our employees as I can...so they can devote themselves to getting conservation on the ground. I may be a background player in the conservation game, but I have no doubt about the importance of my role.”

Eileen Jackson
Human Resources Specialist
Washington

“Working with natural resources was never a job, it was always a calling. I simply love what I do.”

Jay Fuhrer
District Conservationist
North Dakota

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT SPECIALIST

NRCS rangeland management specialists help plan grazing systems that improve the quality of forage and other grazing land functions. You’ll suggest ways to use grazing animals as tools to improve and sustain natural resources. You’ll offer advice on water management, invasive species control, and sustainable forage production. Whether landowners want to use their rangeland to support livestock, wildlife, recreation, or a combination of these, you’ll tailor conservation plans that will help landowners meet their goals.

Qualifications: A bachelor’s degree or higher in range management or a related discipline that includes at least 42 semester hours in a combination of plant, animal, and soil sciences and natural resource management, with at least 18 semester hours in range management; at least 15 semester hours of directly related courses in the plant, animal, and soil sciences, including at least 1 hour in each of these three scientific areas; and at least 9 semester hours of course work in related resource management subjects (see Note on page 7).

BIOLOGIST

As an NRCS biologist, you’ll spend most of your time onsite working with private landowners, other agencies, and units of government. You’ll provide technical support and advice on fish and wildlife habitat development or restoration. You’ll suggest ways to manage fish and wildlife populations, restore streams and wetlands, and improve habitat.

Qualifications: A bachelor’s degree or higher in the biological sciences, agriculture, natural resource management, chemistry, or other related disciplines (see Note on page 7).
ENGINEER
NRCS employs a large number of engineers who have specialized skills in erosion control, water management, structural design, construction, hydraulics, soil mechanics, and environmental protection. We also employ those with general engineering skills. Your job assignments may include restoring streams, controlling erosion, developing water systems for livestock, improving and conserving irrigation water, or restoring wetlands. As an NRCS engineer, you will help solve a host of natural resource problems, and may also become involved in helping communities recover from natural disasters.

Qualifications: A bachelor’s degree or higher in engineering. Specialties include agricultural, environmental and civil engineering.

ENGINEERING TECHNICIAN
As an NRCS engineering technician, you’ll be involved in planning, design, and construction work. You’ll help with surveying the land, plotting survey information, and laying out construction measures. You’ll gather data, make computations, and prepare maps and cross sections of profiles. You may serve as a construction inspector on a wide variety of projects.

Qualifications: Experience on a survey crew running levels and transits or on construction layout and inspection (see Note below).

Note: Qualifications for many jobs may be met with a combination of education and experience. Please contact your local NRCS Human Resources Office for details.
The Natural Resources Conservation Service also offers careers for people trained in the following areas:

- ACCOUNTING
- AGRONOMY
- BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
- CARTOGRAPHY
- CONTRACTING
- ECOLOGY
- FORESTRY
- GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS
- GEOLOGY
- HUMAN RESOURCES
- HYDROLOGY
- INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
- LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
- LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS
- PLANT SCIENCES
- PROGRAM AND ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE
- PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS
- PURCHASING
- SOCIOLOGY
- WATERSHED MANAGEMENT
- WETLANDS SCIENCE
TEAM APPROACH
At NRCS, we know that natural resource issues are often complex, and sometimes require a variety of skills to address a problem. That’s why NRCS believes in an inter-disciplinary team approach. If you encounter a tough problem, you won’t be alone. Regardless of your job title, you will have access to, and back-up from, NRCS specialists in all our disciplines. We believe that by working together—each of us contributing our skills—we can tackle the toughest natural resource challenges.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY
NRCS is an equal opportunity employer. Applicants will be considered without regard to race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, politics, disability, sexual orientation, marital or family status.

TRAINING AND ADVANCEMENT
You will get many chances for on-the-job and formal training. You’ll set career goals and NRCS will help you achieve them.

There are promotion opportunities. How fast and how far you advance depends on you. Advancement opportunities broaden as you gain experience with varied work assignments in different locations.

PLACEMENT AND SALARY
NRCS has more than 2,500 field locations throughout the United States. Regardless of your location, there may be opportunities where you want to work.

Starting salaries are competitive with those of other government agencies and the private sector.
Employee Benefits

During your first 3 years of service, you’ll earn 13 days of vacation leave each year. After 3 years, you’ll earn 20 days. After 15 years, you’ll earn 26 days.

Each year, you will also earn 13 days of sick leave. You may accumulate sick leave without limit to cover serious illnesses. Sick leave may also be used to care for family members.

Special benefits are available if you are disabled or injured while working.

QUALITY OF WORKLIFE
NRCS offers flexible work schedules and programs to help employees balance the demands of work with personal and family responsibilities. These may include various alternative work schedules, job sharing, and telecommuting. Employee assistance programs are also available.

HEALTH AND LIFE INSURANCE
NRCS pays a portion (approximately 80 percent) of your health insurance costs, and there are a variety of medical plans offered under this voluntary program. NRCS also offers new employees the opportunity to sign up for both long-term care insurance and tax-advantage savings accounts for dependent care and healthcare-related expenses.

Another voluntary program provides life insurance. The amount of insurance available to you depends on your salary, and again, NRCS pays part of the cost.

RETIREMENT
Federal employees hired today are covered by the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS). This system has three components: Social Security, a basic annuity, and a tax-deferred Thrift Savings Plan. FERS employees may contribute any percent of their salary (up to the limits established by the Internal Revenue Service) to the Thrift Savings Plan, and NRCS will match up to 5 percent of that amount. Depending on your investment goals, you can invest in any combination of government securities, stock, and bond funds.
STUDENT CAREER EXPERIENCE
Each year, NRCS hires students under its Student Career Experience Program. If you are still attending college or graduate school, you may qualify.

You can alternate periods of work and study, or work on a part-time schedule while attending school. You’ll work for, and learn from, NRCS professionals in your field of study. You’ll learn by doing and earn while you learn.

NRCS also offers students other options such as internships and temporary employment opportunities. Participation in these programs could lead to a job offer and a full-time career when you graduate. For more information, contact your school’s placement office or cooperative education department.

VOLUNTEERS—A VITAL PART OF THE TEAM!
NRCS also provides volunteer opportunities. The Earth Team—the volunteer workforce of NRCS—expands conservation work across America with volunteer time, talent, and energy. The Earth Team is continually looking for volunteers who want to help conserve, protect, and maintain our natural resources. Stop in and visit a local NRCS office or call 1-888-LANDCARE to learn more about becoming an Earth Team Volunteer.

For information on how to apply, contact your local NRCS office, or visit us online at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov

See job opportunities at http://jobsearch.usajobs.opm.gov/a9nrchqsp.asp

Every day, NRCS keeps its commitment to protecting and conserving natural resources on America’s private lands.
Helping People Help the Land

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To file a complaint of discrimination write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20050-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is a equal opportunity provider and employer.